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SCHAKOWSKY HAILS PASSAGE OF BILL TO LOCATE AND SECURE RELEASE OF AMERICAN CITIZEN & ISRAELI SOLDIERS

WASHINGTON, D.C. U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today hailed the passage of HR 1175, legislation to locate and secure the return of Zachary Baumuel, an American citizen, and other Israeli soldiers missing in action.

Schakowsky, a cosponsor of HR 1175, said, "It is imperative that the United States protect its citizens, no matter where they may be located. With this bill, we have an opportunity, through diplomatic talks and as a condition of future cooperation and assistance, to put an end to this long and troubling episode."

The bill calls on the Department of State to raise the issue of Zachary Baumel, Yehuda Katz, and Zvi Feldman immediately with the governments of Syria and Lebanon and the Palestinian Authority. Furthermore, the bill calls on the U.S. government to take into account the cooperation of Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Authority in this matter when issues of economic assistance are discussed.

Zachary Baumel, an American citizen, has been missing since 1982. He was captured following a tank battle with Syrian forces at Sultan Ya' akub in Lebanon. At the time, Mr. Baumel was serving in the Israeli military. It is important to note that Mr. Baumel's service in Israel at no time altered his status as an American citizen.

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Schakowsky said that she hopes that the United States would also support efforts made by Israel to secure the release of Zvi Feldman and Yehuda Katz, two Israeli citizens who served in the Israeli military and were captured along with Zachary Baumel at Sultan Ya' akub in Lebanon.

Yasser Arafat of the PLO provided evidence to Israeli government officials that Zachary Baumel was alive and that Mr. Arafat had information as to his whereabouts. In the Gaza- Jericho agreement reached in 1994 between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli government, Palestinian officials agreed to cooperate with Israel in locating and working for the return of Israeli soldiers missing in action. □ □

Schakowsky said, "Five years have passed since the Gaza-Jericho agreement and Zachary Baumel, Yehuda Katz, and Zvi Feldman are still missing. The United States government must remain vigilant in its efforts to locate those brave soldiers who have been missing for more than 17 years." □